



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FEDERAL WILDLAND FIRE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

September 10, 2004

Q: What is the Federal Wildland Fire Policy?

A: The Federal Wildland Fire Policy and Program Review created in 1995 was the first single comprehensive federal fire policy for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. The review was initiated by the 1994 fire season with its 34 fatalities and growing recognition of fire problems caused by fuel accumulation. The resulting 1995 Federal Fire Policy recognized for the first time the essential role of fire in maintaining natural systems. Most of the policy was incorporated into the federal firefighting agencies' guiding documents for fire management.

In 2000, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior requested a review of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy and its implementation. In its January 2001 report, the responsible working group validated the general recommendations of the 1995 policy, but noted that changes were needed to address issues of ecosystem sustainability, science, education, communication and program evaluation. They also noted that implementation of the 1995 policy was incomplete, particularly in the quality of planning, and that some operational differences still existed.

In June 2003, the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) approved the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy to fully implement the original strategy, address the recommendations for updates in the 2001 Report, and clarify operational issues. The National Fire and Aviation Executive Board (NFAEB) delegated the Federal Fire Policy Directives Task Group to accomplish full implementation.

Q: Weren't the elements of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy already implemented in the agencies' documents guiding fire management?

A: The guiding documents, such as the Forest Service's 5100 Manual, the BLM's 9200 series Directives and the National Park Service's Director's Orders 18 do include language from the 1995 Policy. The goal of the Directives Task Group is to bring together an interagency group to re-write these directives so that all agencies' guiding documents present the same policy direction in the same order. A new addition to the interagency fire management guiding documents is the Operational Clarification identified in the 2003 Interagency Strategy.

Q: Why is it important that the documents be alike?

A: This is key to consistent interpretation of the policy at all levels of the agencies' fire management organizations. In addition, the implementation strategy addresses operational issues that were different between the agencies and will now be the same. The strategy includes specific policy objectives, policy requirements and decision criteria that direct fire operations in a unified manner among the five federal agencies having wildland fire management responsibilities.

Q: How are the States and Tribes involved in this effort?

A: The implementation strategy was developed with Tribal, state, county and local cooperators in mind. While some policy will not fit all non-federal cooperators, the intent was to include everyone by establishing an implementation strategy in which all could find a way to participate. The BIA and the National Association of State Foresters' Fire Director are involved in the goals and process of implementing the strategy.

Q: How does this affect other disciplines and projects?

A: The tasks assigned to the implementation strategy group include developing a common language, revising NWCG training courses, and revising agreements such as mutual aid pacts. Land and Resource Management Plans and Fire Management Plans will likely be affected in revisions to adopt the common language, operational direction and will need to identify where wildland fire use is suitable.

Q: What is changing in operations?

A: There are seven main areas of fire management that will be implemented and reflected in operational manuals and guides such as the Red Book. These address human caused fire suppression, applying only one management objective to a wildland fire, the status of wildland fires versus wildland fire use fires during each stage of the incident, addressing the Appropriate Management Response, clarification of the purpose of Wildland Fire Situation Analysis, addressing opportunities for wildland fire use in Land/Resource Management Plans and criteria for designating an incident a wildland fire from a prescribed fire.

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: The timeline for the tasks, the Department and agency directives to be addressed and the names of the people on the implementation strategy workgroup are available in the Federal Fire Policy Directives Task Group Business Plan on the internet at: www.nifc.gov/fire_policy